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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 001722

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NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2018

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SUBJECT: BANGKOK GOVERNOR TELLS AMBASSADOR POLITICAL  
TENSION EASING SLIGHTLY

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During a June 5 courtesy call, the Ambassador asked Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayothin his view of ongoing anti-government protests. Apirak said he did not believe the situation would spiral out of control. He noted that the atmosphere was currently less tumultuous than in 2006, and Prime Minister Samak had taken a more moderate tone following the weekend of May 31-June 1. Apirak opined that the solution to political confrontation would be found through parliamentary discussion, and he saw benefit in the movement in the House of Representatives to establish a committee with broad membership to consider constitutional amendment.

¶2. (C) Apirak estimated that it was not likely that a military coup would take place -- "if the Army stays strong" in its determination not to allow or instigate another coup. He considered both Army Commander Anupong Paojinda and Prayud Chan-Ocha, Commander of the First Army, to be inclined against a coup. Apirak said he worked very closely with Prayut, as the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, the First Army Command, and the police coordinated matters through a committee on security in Bangkok.

¶3. (C) Apirak commented that, while permits are technically required for protests in Bangkok, people regularly gathered for rallies without permits. For two years, he quipped, the two sides in Thailand's polarized environment have held demonstrations and counter-demonstrations "like ping pong." He acknowledged that the ongoing demonstrations blocked traffic, but he appeared resigned to the situation continuing.

¶4. (C) Comment: We agree with Apirak's assessment that political tension has eased somewhat since the weekend, although the potential for escalation remains.  
JOHN